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Monday, June 1, 1998

## Nervous driver not ready to join NASCAR circuit

Last modified at 6:26 a.m. on Monday, June 1, 1998

Here it is, Sunday afternoon. I'm sitting in the office dutifully writing my Monday morning column.

The quiet of the empty office was broken by the roar of motors coming for the television set. The weekly NASCAR event is under way.

This week it's the MBNA Platinum 400 live from Dover, Del. I've watched NASCAR races before, and am actually becoming a fan as I root for car No. 6, which is driven Mark Martin. I've got \$10 bet on him -- from a recent trip to Las Vegas -- to win the NASCAR points title.

I've always respected what the NASCAR drivers do. The **in-car camera** gives viewers the best camera shot in sports. It puts the viewer right in the race and a true picture of just how fast the cars are going.

As I watched Sunday's race, I realized I was seeing it from a whole different perspective. That's because now I am also a race car driver.



**bob  
hamar**

Bob Hamar is assistant sports editor at the Independent.

Yes, it's true. I made my racing debut Sunday at the Goodwill Grand Prix in downtown Grand Island. The event was put on to raise money for Goodwill. SuperBowl provided the cars and area businesses sponsored the them.

Other businesses, like The Independent, sponsored the teams.

NOW THE CARS we drove weren't quite as powerful as the ones on the **NASCAR** circuit. They were more like go-carts.

Actually, they were exactly like go-carts because they were go-carts. But that doesn't change the fact that I'm now a race car driver. The principles used in go-cart racing are the same as the big boys in **NASCAR** use.

Our Independent team was in the first race of the day, called the Pump & Pantry Celebrities Relay. It also included teams from KSYZ, KHAS-TV, KRGI Radio, KGIN-TV, NTV, the Grand Island city council and Sen. Chris Petersen.

"Team Independent" was made up of reporter Tracy Overstreet, photographer Gerik Parmele, photographer Jennifer Bruno, news editor Josh Awtry and myself.

Reporter Linda Spiering held the car as the driver changes were made and reporter Melanie Brandert was team photographer. Assignments editor Renee Hansen was the crew chief.

As you can see, "Team Independent" was a well-oiled machine. At 10 a.m., we were ready to roll.

Unfortunately, we had to wait until 10:30 to drive. Just enough time to let the nervousness set in. You see, my teammates didn't know it (until I told them just before race time) but I was a rookie.

I'd never been in a go-cart in my life, but I tried to look like a professional by wearing my "Speed Racer" cap.

OF COURSE I couldn't wear it during the race. All drivers were required to wear helmets, and for good reason. Things can get a little rough on the asphalt speedways of the Downtown Grand Island Raceway.

Tracy "The Jet" Overstreet got our team started with a strong leadoff leg. Overstreet made a bold move at the start and "Team Independent" had the early lead.

Gerik "The Jet" Parmele took over on the second leg. He passed some cars. Maybe some cars passed him, too. I'm not really sure. I was starting to feel the nerves as my leg approached.

Jennifer "The Jet" Bruno drove the third leg, and kept us right in the hunt.

Then it was my turn. Jennifer "The Jet" Bruno leaped from the car, and Bob "The Jet" Hamar was in the seat for the first time.

The advice I had been given from the veterans was simple. Just floor it and never, ever, use the brake. So that's what I did. I thought I was doing pretty well until one driver snuck by me on a tight turn.

Truthfully, the whole lap was just a blur. All I remember is I can really feel every bump on the street and the turns were tougher than they look. It was all quite a rush.

When my lap was over, I turned the car over to Josh "The Jet" Awtry. Josh brought the team home to a respectable fifth-place finish. KHAS-TV won the Celebrity Relay and moved on to the Mayor's Cup race later in the day.

Of course we wanted to win, but our inexperienced team received some valuable experience on Sunday.

A little preseason practice next year and we'll be ready to make a serious run at the Mayor's Cup.

The Goodwill Grand Prix was a big success. Next year's Grand Prix should be bigger and even better.

I certainly plan to be back racing next year. That is unless I join the **NASCAR** circuit first.

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